

## Introduction

Through the thin polyester curtains shading the window of the dimly lit motel room, the red and blue flashing squad car lights illuminate the faces of NeNe and James in violent color.<sup>1</sup> They stare at each other, frozen in the light, listening to the static hiss of male voices on the police radio outside, whispering the standard list of questions frenetically among themselves, their voices tense and accusatory as they anticipate the officer's knock on the door. Is there dope in the room? Does anyone have a gun? Is the officer coming to arrest NeNe? Is he here for James? They each consider the answers and their implications in their own minds, collectively exhaling as the squad car pulls out of the motel parking lot. James, who is thirty-five and has spent the last seventeen years of his life in a Colorado prison following a drug deal gone very wrong, lies back on the bed and covers his face, still and quiet.

Outside, Officer Berman checks the time. He is exhausted, with only an hour left on his shift, and feels relieved not to have to make another arrest tonight. The ten-block stretch that comprises what police term a "known prostitution area" emptied as soon as he entered and found a woman with seven outstanding arrest warrants sitting at a bus stop, waiting for clients. She is now handcuffed in the back of his squad car, refusing to speak. He knows that out here she goes by Peaches, although the name on her lengthy criminal record is plain Mary Washington. Officer Berman is responsible for two of her twenty-six arrests on prostitution and drug paraphernalia charges. Tears glisten on her cheeks, her wig slightly askew, and Officer Berman feels sorry for her as he thinks about his daughter, who is about the same age and attending community college with plans to become a nurse.

"Mary, you gotta get it together, maybe think about gettin' into a treatment program or somethin'," Officer Berman says as he makes eye contact with her in the rear view mirror. "You can't live like this forever." Her silence as she nods in response does not indicate agreement with

the officer; she knows that a camera in the squad car is recording their interactions and she does not want to provide evidence that may later be used against her in court. As the squad car pulls onto East Colfax Avenue, she is relieved that she dropped her two young children off at her aunt's place before leaving the motel room where she is currently residing, and wonders which of her neighbors and other acquaintances she will see in Denver County Jail tonight.

NeNe, James, Mary, and Officer Berman live and work on opposite sides of a gendered, classed, and racialized battle fought daily in neighborhoods with high levels of outdoor illicit drug and prostitution activity throughout the United States. As with all people caught in wars not of their own making, they do their best to care for themselves and their loved ones while making a living by following rules and engaging in behaviors that they do not always agree with or feel good about. By telling their stories, this book paints an ethnographic portrait of how they relate to one another within the context of fraught cultural and legal systems that both restrict their work activities and profoundly shape their lives.

This is a book about two groups of people: those who earn an income by engaging in street-based prostitution and those involved in criminal justice and social services efforts to curtail that prostitution through their work as police patrol officers, detectives, public defenders, judges, probation officers, and court-mandated therapeutic treatment providers. In Denver, Colorado, as in many U.S. cities, street-based prostitution's criminalized status, ties to the illicit drug economy, and public visibility result in frequent interactions among criminal justice professionals, social services providers, and women involved in activities that Colorado state law classifies as prostitution. Coauthored by an anthropologist and a legal scholar, this book explores these interactions and the cultural context in which they take place by drawing on six years of ethnographic research with street-involved<sup>2</sup> women and the criminal justice and social services professionals who regularly interact with them.

## Systemic Intimacy: Street-Involved Women and the Criminal Justice–Social Services Alliance

Street-involved women exchange sex for cash or drugs as one of their strategies to navigate homelessness, addiction, compromised mental

and physical health, and criminal justice system involvement. They face criminalization and stigmatization that isolate them from available legal, health, and social services, which generally regard sex trading and illicit drug use as pathological behaviors. Some services providers require that women agree to stop trading sex and using illicit drugs prior to receiving sustained assistance with obtaining housing, nonemergency medical care, and other necessary things. Hustling, as many women call street-based prostitution and the other activities (both legal and not) in which they regularly engage in order to get by, involves no such restrictive demands, and this stark reality explains why so many women choose working the streets over the vast criminal justice and social services apparatus designed to extricate them from the trade.

We term this apparatus “the criminal justice–social services alliance,” a punitive-therapeutic confederation of federal, state, and municipal law enforcement agencies and state, municipal, or independent nonprofit social services entities. Despite their various individual and occupation-specific orientations, all alliance professionals must, as a condition of their jobs, implement a cultural ethos characterized by three primary beliefs described below regarding street-involved women’s needs. Alliance professionals may mobilize this ethos in different ways throughout the course of their interactions with street-involved women during arrests, court hearings, and meetings with social services providers or other court-appointed officials, yet they nonetheless form a constant undercurrent that shapes street-involved women’s lives in powerful ways.

First, the alliance ethos regards street-based sex trading and illicit drug use as the inherently harmful results of women’s experiences with violent, grief-generating, or otherwise traumatic events. The second core aspect of this ethos maintains that street-involved women require sociolegal intervention through arrest, incarceration, court-mandated treatment, or, in some cases, all three, in order to stop these behaviors, irrespective of the women’s own wishes or economic situation. Third, alliance professionals believe that women can only demonstrate progress toward ending their involvement in prostitution and illicit drug use by evincing readiness to change, expressing accountability for their individual actions, and complying with restrictions determined by alliance professionals. Taken together, these three core elements of the alliance ethos situate the individual woman and her decision making as the problem,

rather than the constrained socioeconomic contexts in which she must often make very difficult choices.

Individual alliance professionals' personal beliefs and job descriptions indisputably differ, yet the ethos underlying their work is sharply distinguished from rights-based approaches that support women irrespective of whether they decide to continue sex trading or find another means of making a living. Alliance professionals tasked with street-involved women's regulatory oversight accordingly cannot endorse, or engage in, harm reduction or other peer-to-peer approaches that include the women as equal partners. This virtually ensures that street-involved women have little influence over outcomes related to their arrest, incarceration, court-mandated therapeutic treatment, probation or parole, and child custody determinations. Such an approach also demands women's ideological conformity, or at least a convincing performance of it, to the alliance ethos in order to achieve freedom from correctional control. The alliance ethos requires physical as well as ideological conformity: a woman who fails to convincingly demonstrate her commitment to finding a legal means of self-support while staying sober faces legal sanctions, including incarceration, if she tests positive, during court-mandated random screenings, for controlled substances or sexually transmitted infections.

We use the shorthand term "the alliance" to refer to the coalescence of punitive-therapeutic forces that work together to police or otherwise regulate street-involved women through arrest, incarceration, and court-mandated drug or other therapeutic treatment. Such policing and regulation, which enjoys significant public and political support on the federal, state, and municipal levels, relies on an interventionist discourse that narrowly positions women's sex trading as the result of traumatic life experiences rather than of the broader gendered socioeconomic realities that frame their lives. The alliance converges around the notion that street-involved women require intervention and supervised rehabilitation in order to address the trauma thought to motivate their involvement in criminalized and stigmatized ways of earning a living.

As part of a mutually reinforcing process, the alliance ethos interprets women's entrenchment in the criminalized economy that dominates the economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in which they live as evidence of their pathological individual and community traits. Alliance

professionals accordingly have high levels of legally and socially endorsed discretionary latitude in policing or otherwise intervening in the “bad neighborhoods” where women engage in street-based sex trading. Such latitude results directly from dominant cultural perceptions that such communities are home to people with no respect for the law and whose activities threaten the prevailing social order. The alliance ethos accordingly ignores the reality that street-involved women as a social group face exclusion from equal opportunities and full participation in the legal economy.

These factors combine to make alliance professionals an easy target for academics, activists, and liberal media criticism because they, as a condition of their work, must enforce the alliance ethos even though they may well understand the fallacies that underpin it when applied to the daily business of living for street-involved women. Just as broader sexist, classist, and racist forces shape the lives of women who solicit publicly, alliance professionals’ job requirements mandate that they tacitly enforce these inequalities in order to keep or advance within their respective professions. The ease with which alliance professionals do so depends on their individual moral and political orientations, such that those who prefer clear-cut punitive problem-solving approaches are less likely to critically examine their role in reinforcing inequalities than those who acknowledge the nuanced complexities that inform individual decision making.

Encounters between street-involved women and alliance professionals are ultimately exchanges that take place between individuals in the context of the abstract social forces that shape their respective understandings of the social world and their places within it. Street-involved women’s descriptions of such encounters accordingly emphasize individual alliance professionals’ abilities to invoke powerful sociolegal forces, rather than the political climate that undergirds such discretionary authority. Individual members of both groups utilize their discretion in conjunction with the prevailing beliefs they acquire from their peers in the setting where they earn an income, such that alliance professionals’ workplace success depends on their ability to rapidly assess individual street-involved women’s intentions, motivations, and inner states as a means to make potentially life-altering decisions about their access to services and freedom from correctional control. Street-involved

women likewise cultivate ways of interacting with alliance professionals, including (but certainly not limited to) evoking sympathy and trust in ways that produce particular desired results, such as avoiding arrest. Despite discretion's role in mitigating the alliance ethos, many alliance professionals and street-involved women describe their frustration with political and sociolegal forces that ultimately demand adherence to a status quo that promotes class, race, and gender inequality, along with self-serving assumptions that characterize street-involved women as in need of interventions that only the alliance can provide.

Alliance professionals' use of discretion involves their obtaining public and personal information about street-involved women in settings populated by a regular cast of characters who often recognize one another from previous interactions. Street-involved women, particularly those who have engaged in the life for an extended period of time, often have reputations among alliance professionals tasked with their policing or other forms of regulation. For women whose family members also engage in transactional sex, these reputations may span generations and include an extensive history of criminal justice system involvement. Alliance professionals use the knowledge they acquire about the women to characterize them as part of a continuum ranging from victims of abuse to dangerous agents who spread disease or commit violent crimes. Street-involved women likewise engage in information-gathering processes that allow them to characterize alliance professionals on a continuum ranging from empathic to sadistic. Officer Berman has a street reputation as caring because he treats the women he encounters and arrests with empathy, whereas another officer may inspire intimidation and resentment due to her use of rough physical treatment or demeaning language.

We theorize the cultural dynamics that inform these encounters as *systemic intimacy*, which refers to the interpersonal means by which individuals assess one another, and the broader institutional structures and social forces of which they are a part, as they go about earning a living. Cast in an adversarial relationship by the sociolegal norms that govern their respective income-generation strategies, street-involved women and alliance professionals both describe their interactions as fraught and emotionally charged. We accordingly use the word "intimacy" to convey three prevailing characteristics of the relationship between the women

and those tasked with their legal oversight: the need to make claims to expert knowledge about each other's motivations and inner states, the individual cultivation of fragile intergroup trust bonds as a means to obtain specialized in-group knowledge, and the personalization of broader social forces that inform inter- and intragroup encounters. This intimacy is "systemic" because it is legally and socially sanctioned, occurs as part of a social process by which individuals reconcile contradictions between their lived experiences and the legislative and policy frameworks governing them, and operates via powerful forces endorsed by prevailing social norms.

Systemic intimacy first and foremost demands reification of each group by the other such that these oppositional forces co-create individuals' ways of working with and responding to one another. Such reification involves the presumption of a generalized worldview and inner state to the extent that it enables an individual to predict or explain, with reasonable confidence, actions taken by a member of the oppositional group by drawing on previous experiences, collective knowledge imparted by other group members, or additional specialized forms of expertise. Hence an alliance professional might say with confidence, in support of programming or policies that restrict women's movements and autonomy, "for these women, instability is the norm due to the trauma they have experienced. We need to provide them with stability." In the explanatory model that accompanies such a worldview, a woman's unsanctioned departure from a drug treatment program or failure to report to probation becomes further evidence of her inability to adhere to structure without alliance professionals' guidance and associated punitive sanctions.

Street-involved women also claim such expertise, as when they characterize as a "cop mentality" binary worldviews that disregard the complex realities that may result in a woman's inability to report to probation or remain in a drug treatment program as a result of her childcare obligations or health problems. Alliance professionals and the women both need to accurately gauge one another's inner states in order to make rapid decisions regarding their conduct during encounters with one another, yet their failure to do so obviously results in very different consequences. A street-involved woman faces arrest and loss of liberty if she is unable to quickly identify and avoid an undercover police officer posing

as a potential client, whereas the undercover officer may risk job loss or reassignment to less desirable work if he consistently fails to arrest women on prostitution-related charges.

Alliance professionals face indisputable challenges as they attempt to implement the ethos that informs their everyday work, yet the women under their purview face far more serious pressures to acquire the specialized knowledge necessary to manage alliance encounters. Encounters between street-involved women and alliance professionals take place in the context of the systemic socio-institutional failure to provide women with sustainable alternatives to sex trading, which consequently remains their primary solution to the immediate problems of homelessness and addiction. The women accordingly tend to individualize positive alliance experiences by describing specific professionals—rather than organizations, facilities, or the system more generally—as providing them with much-needed services, psycho-social support, or other benefits. For instance, women will praise the individual social worker who helps them to facilitate an open adoption, or the trusted police officer who warns them to avoid a particular city block due to the potential for an impending drug raid to turn violent. This practice underscores the women's prevailing view that while particular alliance professionals may perform acts of kindness, the punitive ethos to which they remain beholden reinforces the marginalizing forces that compel women to exchange sex for cash or drugs.

The individual cultivation of tenuous and often fragile trust bonds between alliance professionals and the women serves as a means for members of both groups to obtain specialized knowledge that they can mobilize to achieve particular goals. These bonds are often temporary and fraught with suspicion because of the inequalities that frame their cultivation and maintenance, and street-involved women remain ever cognizant of alliance professionals' disproportionate power and authority relative to them. Nevertheless, such short-term bonds can produce results that the women regard as desirable in at least some respects, as in the case of a detective who negotiates a suspended sentence for a woman who provides the information necessary to build a criminal case. The repercussions that ensue from such an exchange, of course, vary according to the circumstances in which it takes place and the individuals involved. Most street-involved individuals will positively regard a woman

who identifies a serial rapist in a police lineup, whereas a woman who provides information to police about a neighborhood purveyor of controlled substances may have good cause to fear for her life.

Longer-term trust bonds, such as those between the women and their probation officers, diversion court workers, and social services providers, are difficult, if not impossible, to sustain in mutually beneficial ways. The powers that criminal justice professionals wield in the women's lives considerably limit the amount of information the women will openly share with them; most women aspire to be free of correctional control as soon as possible, and accordingly do their best to self-present in accordance with the alliance ethos while withholding potentially damaging information about their activities. Women may feel somewhat safer, and accordingly be more forthcoming, with social services providers than they do with criminal justice professionals, yet these providers face strong pressure from private, municipal, state, or federal funders that require them to demonstrate "success," which is often measured by the number of women who stop sex trading and illicit drug use as a result of receiving their services. Such demonstration of success involves a high-stakes proposition for many services providers, whose restricted budgets and overburdened, emotionally exhausted staff often struggle to meet women's basic needs in ways that make it difficult to establish strong trust bonds.

Social services providers are well aware that many of their street-involved clients will ultimately opt for the relative freedom of the street when faced with untenable services provision conditions. This reality sometimes results in women's relationships with services providers that are as tenuous and fragile as those among women and the criminal justice professionals who seek them out as informants. Providers are well aware of the women's significant socioeconomic constraints and accordingly must reconcile their desires to see each client's personal transformation become a success story that attests to the program's strengths with the knowledge that powerful socioeconomic forces constrain the women in ways that are far beyond the scope of their agency or organization. In this context, it is rather unsurprising that a services provider may decide to provide a particular woman, whom she sees as more capable of meeting benchmarks for agency success, with additional benefits or support. Yet many street-involved women could understandably ex-

perience this discretion as favoritism, or outright discrimination, rather than as the application of valid agency objectives as a means to meet funder or board expectations.

Systemic intimacy between alliance professionals and street-involved women also manifests in the personalization of both inter- and intragroup encounters and the broader social forces that inform them. Women, Latina/os, African Americans,<sup>3</sup> and working-class people more generally dominate in alliance occupations that involve the greatest amount of everyday contact with street-involved women. They accordingly face the challenging task of policing or otherwise exercising control over individuals who resemble them in gender, phenotype, and at least some elements of shared culture and experiences, all while reporting to White male supervisors and colleagues who may not be sensitive to the confluence of gender, class, and ethno-racial identity. Such a situation places these alliance professionals in a position where they face accusations of “taking sides” or, worse still, inadequately performing if they draw colleagues’ or supervisors’ attention to these issues.

Street-involved women are acutely aware of the ways in which sexism, classism, and racism collide for the women, African American, and Latina/o alliance professionals tasked with their policing or other forms of oversight in a work environment managed largely by White men. Street-involved women, rather than the alliance professionals, routinely and explicitly brought to our attention the complex ways in which gender, class, and ethno-racial identity intersect in their encounters with alliance professionals. They frequently dismissed female criminal justice professionals as having “somethin’ to prove” in their male-dominated work environment and, much more generously, characterized working-class White male police patrol officers as “just doing a job” in enforcing laws they had no role in creating. Time and again, African American street-involved women conveyed some version of what Ms. Ella, who has many years of street experience, advised a younger African American colleague: “When you get arrested, you don’t want a lady cop, and you better pray you don’t get a Black lady cop, ‘cause you out there embarrassin’ her.”

Alliance professionals, following dominant U.S. social norms in professional settings staffed by men and women from different ethno-racial and class backgrounds, rarely have frank conversations about ethnicity,

race, gender, or class, even when these issues may be central to the topic under discussion. Instead, alliance professionals follow prevailing U.S. cultural norms by obliquely conveying their attitudes and beliefs about these sensitive subjects through tone, word choice, and other subtle behaviors. This obliqueness may involve personalization, in which alliance professionals claim in-group knowledge to advance a particular point of view, which can consequently silence alliance professionals who do not belong to the same group. For instance, at a social workers' meeting about coordinating services for street-involved women, Susan watched a feminist Latina colleague bristle with visible frustration when a much older African American man stated, "This is an ongoing problem in the Black community: our women need guidance because they lack a father figure in their lives." In making unequivocal claims to in-group knowledge without attending to gendered socioeconomic realities, he effectively reinforced these inequalities while silencing others who could not make similar in-group knowledge claims.

In another instance that Susan observed, the only African American woman present at a correctional facility staff meeting defended an incarcerated African American woman's actions and received a rather dismissive response from her White and Latina/o colleagues. After she reasoned that the incarcerated woman's angry reaction to a White peer's racist remark was warranted under the circumstances in which they took place, her Latino colleague bluntly and rhetorically asked, "What does history have to do with why she's in jail? She made bad choices, and here she is. We need to move on." In this and numerous other instances, the nuances involved in such personalization—and colleagues' responses to it—actively discourage solidarity between alliance professionals and street-involved women based on shared membership in deprivileged groups.

The systemic character of the intimacy that pervades relationships between street-involved women and alliance professionals is evidenced by the pervasive and totalizing forms it takes, including official sanction, negotiations between contradictory individual experiences and official expectations, and the significantly negative impact it has on both street-involved women's and alliance professionals' lives and overall well-being. The first and most obvious way that this intimacy manifests in systemic form is through its codification in law and policy, which pro-

vides individual alliance professionals with powerful interpretive tools to guide and ascertain the limits of their discretionary decision making. Yet occupation-specific cultural and linguistic norms also inform alliance professionals' work in ways that do not always correspond to codified law and policy. For instance, an addictions-treatment-program staff member may inform her colleagues that a client is "not a good fit," thereby conveying a vast amount of information without needing to explicitly state her concerns about the client's mental health, personality, relationships with current program clients, or other issues that concern her. Likewise, police patrol officers may decide to intensify prostitution-related arrests or policing in response to citizen complaints from neighborhood business owners, rather than impoverished local residents, since the former enjoy considerably more political clout. Such decisions remain within the boundaries of codified law and policy, but sometimes only just, and always take place in a context characterized by the uneasy coexistence of alliance cultural norms with those that govern street life.

Recognizing and reconciling the often-considerable contradictions between alliance and street cultural norms is a quotidian element of work life for those alliance professionals who must build rapport with street-involved women in order to conduct criminal investigations, engage in undercover work, or perform street outreach. For example, a therapeutic-treatment-facility worker who calls weekly from her office to report her clients' drug test results to probation officers will fully expect to encounter these same women during street outreach and spend time with them while they are experiencing the effects of illicit drug use. Likewise, an advocate at a homeless shelter may advise a client who wants to receive in-patient mental health treatment to explicitly tell police officers that she intends to commit suicide, because the advocate knows that making this statement will legally obligate the officers to transport the woman to a hospital or psychiatric facility that will admit her. Individuals on both sides of this sociolegal apparatus reconcile these contradictions while simultaneously being affected by at least some aspects of one another's lives. Alliance professionals experience high levels of work-related stress and stigma by association that may result in the same types of substance abuse, intimate partner violence, and stress-related mental and physical health problems they are tasked with policing, treating, or otherwise regulating among the women. Police officers

routinely witness extreme forms of violence and human suffering, while social workers support their clients through relapse, child custody loss, incarceration, and other grief-generating events. Street-involved women readily acknowledge that the emotional toll wrought by these experiences can seriously compromise alliance professionals' abilities to treat them with respect and empathy.

The concept of systemic intimacy captures the reality that alliance professionals and street-involved women share a relationship that features both shared physical spaces, including neighborhoods, correctional facilities, or agency offices, and sometimes-extensive knowledge of each other's normative cultural practices. Yet the alliance also disproportionately concedes power to the criminal justice system because social services agencies that derive financial resources from, or cooperate with, law enforcement organizations must conform to the correctional model of control. Social services providers coopted into the alliance under the guise of providing therapeutic treatment ultimately remain accountable to the correctional model of intervention, control, and rehabilitation on terms developed in the absence of any meaningful consultation with those most affected by illicit drug use, street prostitution, or related social issues. In many ways, then, the analysis presented here builds on an extensive body of social science literature that identifies and critiques the ways in which well-intentioned individuals find themselves promoting policy and law that they know to be ineffective at best and harmful at worst.

At core, this book argues that the criminal justice system's financial and ideological predominance within the criminal justice–social services alliance results in an amalgamation that highly individualizes women's sex trading and illicit drug use activities as pathological choices they make due to the cognitive distortions believed to result from abusive or otherwise traumatic life experiences. This approach advocates therapeutic treatment interventions, some of which are court monitored, for street-involved women while effectively ignoring the gendered socioeconomic circumstances that inform their decision making. Such incomplete (or even false) presumptions about street-involved women's experiences with illicit drug use, violence, homelessness, and sex trading accordingly engender counterproductive results reliant upon dominant U.S. cultural norms that support individualism and deny structural inequality.

## Conceptualizing Bureaucratic Power and Control

Our analysis unites four primary theoretical-conceptual areas: street-level bureaucracy, the reproduction of violence through law and policy, therapeutic governance, and the disproportionate exercise of these social forces on individuals living in neighborhoods least able to contest state intrusion. We hope that systemic intimacy, our small theoretical contribution to this rich body of existing work, will help academics and practitioners to more fully analyze the complex means by which individuals negotiate the adversarial systems of which they are a part, whether willingly or otherwise. A thorough understanding of the means by which individuals create, negotiate, and protest these conflicting frameworks is essential to the development of evidence-based law and policy that enhances gender, race, and class equality.

### *Street-Level Bureaucracy*

In his germinal *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (2010 [1980]), political scientist Michael Lipsky documents the significant challenges facing public sector workers, whom he broadly defined as including police officers, social workers, teachers, and others tasked with the front-line implementation of law and policy. Members of the criminal justice–social services alliance fall squarely into this front-line category. Lipsky argues that public encounters with street-level bureaucrats constitute the “places where citizens experience directly the government they have implicitly constructed” (Lipsky, 2010 [1980], p. xi). These experiences are rarely positive, he contends, due to chronically inadequate resources, restricted capacities, ambiguous or conflicting agency goals, difficulties measuring success, and the reality that most street-level bureaucrats’ clients are involuntary. While this characterization applies to the alliance workers as a whole, those in the social services describe greater difficulties in these areas, particularly with respect to the ambiguities and resource shortages that characterize their work.

Street-level bureaucrats in the alliance, as in Lipsky’s conceptualization, contend with this significant gap between the ideals of public service and the often significantly constrained realities of its practice by

exercising discretionary authority and establishing routinized means of dealing with clients. Lipsky notes that street-level bureaucrats employ these coping mechanisms in ways that, due to time and resource constraints, result in simplified client typologies and scripted modes of interaction. The pressures and realities of their jobs leave no alternatives for the alliance's street-level bureaucrats, who become interpreters of law and policy through the exercise of discretion. Yet Lipsky also argues that street-level bureaucrats deny their own discretionary authority as a means to limit their personal responsibility; in other words, by simply stating, "it's the law" or "that's how it is," a street-level bureaucrat is able to effectively evade a client's requests for exceptions to the rules or other special favors (Lipsky, 2010 [1980]).

As quintessential street-level bureaucrats, alliance professionals' discretion remains limited by the will of their political masters, who create the legislation and budget allocations that determine and direct the course of alliance action. The result is a self-referencing body of ostensibly well-intentioned law and policy that remains tautologically and hermetically sealed firmly within the alliance ethos, as in the example of the federal Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act's definition of anyone who trades sex while under the age of eighteen as a victim of trafficking entitled to assistance measures due to their inability to consent (U.S. Congress, 2000). The practical result of this legislation is that on a young woman's eighteenth birthday, alliance professionals have statutory tools at their disposal to prosecute her as a criminal perpetrator for engaging in prostitution rather than providing services to her.<sup>4</sup>

### *Reproduction of Violence through Law and Public Policy*

The sharp age-based legal division between receiving services and facing criminal prosecution is just one example of the ways in which street-involved women, as well as some of the alliance professionals who work with them, experience the reproduction of violence through law and public policy that focuses on particular personal aspects (such as age) while ignoring or neglecting race, class, and gender. Our analysis is deeply informed by the work of political scientists Kristin Bumiller and Naomi Murakawa, whose research explores how the implementation of laws and policies designed to provide assistance to those in

need may reproduce sexism, racism, and other forms of structural violence. Bumiller and Murakawa both provide examples of how federal and state government efforts to stem enduring inequalities can unintentionally reinforce the very exclusionary forces they sought to prevent. The application of the law's blunt force to complex and nuanced social issues likewise creates paradoxical or unintended results in encounters between street-involved women and alliance professionals.

Bumiller, who interviewed women seeking services at domestic violence shelters and studied media coverage of two widely publicized U.S. gang rape trials, argues that intensified state involvement in criminalizing and prosecuting violence against women resulted in the reification of women's vulnerability. Services provision and legal recourses available to women, Bumiller argues, take place on terms that mandate women's submission to authority, enforced dependency, and performance of the "good victim" role (Bumiller, 2008). Street-involved women in Denver likewise describe the alliance ethos' pressure for conformance as a means to obtain services and resources, particularly by eschewing street prostitution and foregoing illicit drug use in order to become what both street-involved women and alliance professionals gloss as "a productive member of society."

In her historical analysis of the U.S. criminal justice system's expansion, Murakawa documents the unintended consequences of law and policy designed to eliminate racism in the criminal justice system. She argues that civil rights activists and their political allies supported federal expansion as a result of their belief that further government oversight would reduce racial bias through a professionalization of the justice system. Instead, Murakawa contends that this resulted in a vastly expanded carceral state that continued to arrest and incarcerate African Americans at far higher rates than their peers of other ethno-racial backgrounds (Murakawa, 2014). Federal, state, and municipal efforts to create task forces designed to address street-based prostitution as a social issue in many U.S. cities, including Denver, have likewise resulted in disproportionately high rates of incarceration for poor women, many of whom are African American or women of color.<sup>5</sup>

Bumiller's work is particularly relevant in its detailed discussion regarding the extensive professional apparatus developed in response to the social problem of sexual and domestic violence against women. Bu-

miller describes attempts to prosecute abusers and provide assistance to their victims through a merger of the therapeutic-medical establishment and the criminal justice system. The result is a “highly rationalized form of social control” that neatly separates female victims of violence, who require therapeutic treatment and caseworker guidance, from male perpetrators who face criminal prosecution for their abusive or otherwise violent behavior (Bumiller, 2008, p. 14). Bumiller convincingly demonstrates how the discourse of trauma and victimization effectively demands that women seeking legal redress or social services submit to a highly feminized victim role through compliance with caseworker-mandated treatment protocols. Street-involved women who wish to receive alliance services must likewise self-identify as victims in order to fit the alliance ethos’ understanding of their lives, often by emphasizing the formative impact that sexual or other forms of abuse had on them, irrespective of whether they actually regarded these events as victimizing.

Street-involved women routinely face the consequences of both the carceral state that Murakawa describes and the medicalization of trauma that Bumiller documents. As Krystal succinctly noted of her transition from working the street to court-mandated supervision, “My P[robation] O[fficer] is my new pimp; she makes sure she always tell me just how fucked up she thinks I am.” Krystal’s analogy emphasizes the manipulative power and control dynamic she regards as characteristic of her dealings with both probation officer, who uses the law to maintain authority, and pimp, who employs street-endorsed means of enforcing his will. Yet rather than acknowledging the reasons why street-involved women like Krystal regard these otherwise very different figures in similar ways, the alliance ethos employs trauma as a universal justification for various discretionary forms of intervention in street-involved women’s lives. This positioning of street-involved women as inherently unstable victims who require intervention eclipses any analysis of the systemic exclusionary forces that limit women’s options for making sustainable life changes, and thereby reinforces the alliance’s power and control in what could be described as self-serving ways.

### *Therapeutic Governance*

Therapeutic governance refers to state-endorsed intervention or other forms of oversight justified by the need to maintain order among individuals or groups deemed disorderly by sociolegal or other powerful cultural forces. First conceptualized in reference to persons displaced by war, therapeutic governance “makes a link between psychological well-being and security, and seeks to foster personalities able to cope with risk and insecurity” (Pupavac, 2005, pp. 161–62). This conceptual framework powerfully undergirds relationships between alliance professionals and street-involved women, with the former being tasked with policing such disorder among the latter. Prevailing state and cultural forces accordingly work in concert to advance therapeutic governance as the only viable solution to the various forms of internal disorder that the alliance ethos regards as destabilizing or otherwise compromising the women’s abilities to change their lives.

Correctional facilities and other institutional sites of alliance control, in Denver as nationally, implement therapeutic governance in the form of addictions- and mental-health-treatment programs known as “therapeutic community.” Such programs involve a totalizing group living environment in which women must enforce the alliance ethos by publicly holding one another accountable for the circumstances that resulted in state-endorsed intervention in their lives via incarceration or other court-mandated supervision (McCorkel, 2013). Accordingly, when women in therapeutic community groups tell one another to “fake it till you make it,” they are also sometimes tacitly advising their peers’ discursive adherence to the alliance ethos as a means to avoid being penalized with extended or intensified forms of correctional control. Women’s successful adherence to these discourses and the ideologies of which they are a part result in considerable benefits, including the freedom from correctional control that accompanies the alliance’s version of successful “rehabilitation” (Hackett, 2013; Pollack, 2010).

Therapeutic governance generally positions women’s addictions and involvement in other criminalized activities as byproducts of their abusive relationships with men, low self-esteem, and traumatic life events. Yet, as Bumiller observed with respect to services available to women who have experienced violence, therapeutic governance often demands

even more extreme conditions of submission to power and control than women have experienced in other areas of their lives. Clinical social work scholar Shoshanna Pollack argues that Canadian correctional facilities' attempts to implement therapeutic discourse in the form of self-esteem classes and related programming ignore the various forms of socioeconomic exclusion the women face (Pollack, 2007). Sociologists Susan Starr Sered and Maureen Norton-Hawk likewise contend that the twelve step ideology advocated by Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other addictions treatment groups, relies on a personal responsibility discourse that requires submission to a Higher Power in ways that reinforce criminalized women's marginalization while disacknowledging the already significant constraints on their freedom and decision making (Sered and Norton-Hawk, 2011). This occurs in sharp contrast to rights-based and harm-reduction approaches, often created and promoted by women of color and women who have traded sex, which advocate political education and agendas that hold society accountable for these enduring inequalities (Dewey and St. Germain, 2015).

### *Unequal Exercise of Bureaucratic Power and Control*

Residential segregation into areas of concentrated poverty pushes individuals to engage in criminalized income-generation strategies as part of street cultural norms that sharply differ from, or even contradict, the ethos embraced by alliance professionals tasked with neighborhood policing. Despite the critical role gender plays in these complex social interactions, the majority of urban anthropological and sociological works addressing social relationships and everyday life in socioeconomically and ethno-racially segregated neighborhoods focus on men's experiences in ways that minimize or even erase women's roles in criminalized street life.<sup>6</sup> Their findings are nonetheless relevant to street-involved women's lives, in which neighborhood segregation, and street culture more generally, plays a powerful governing role in gendered divisions of sexual and other forms of illicit labor.

Segregation's deep socioeconomic roots are inseparable from the cultural norms that frame everyday life for street-involved women in communities created generations ago in the wake of deindustrializa-

tion's massive labor market reorganization, White suburbanization, and concomitant ghettoization of African Americans and Latina/os in urban neighborhoods with few legal opportunities to earn money. Sociologist William Julius Wilson argues that these conditions created an "underclass" effectively excluded from socioeconomic opportunities afforded to residents outside such neighborhoods (Wilson, 2012 [1987]). Wilson also contends, echoing findings by Canadian criminologists John Hagan and Bill McCarthy, that such exclusion encourages a process whereby individuals, sometimes from a very young age, socialize one another into available—and not always legal—ways of making a living (Hagan and McCarthy, 1997).

Sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, building on Wilson's "underclass" theorization, concisely characterize segregation as "an institutional tool for isolating the by-products of racial oppression: crime, drugs, violence, illiteracy, poverty, despair, and their growing social and economic costs" (Massey and Denton, 1993, p. 217). Wilson, Massey and Denton, as well as many other social scientists, describe segregation as productive of a particular culture that sociologist Elijah Anderson (1999) neatly terms "the code of the street," in which respect and the individual responsibility to protect oneself are paramount. Despite the alliance ethos' positioning of street codes as inherently threatening to law and the social order, sociologists and anthropologists have clearly demonstrated that these codes effectively govern and self-regulate the illegal income-generation strategies available to residents of segregated neighborhoods (Venkatesh, 2009; Bourgois, 1995).

In this complex cultural context, our study design sought to capture the sometimes blatant and sometimes subtle means by which alliance professionals and street-involved women exercise, experience, negotiate, and resist these various forms of power and control. This considerable undertaking involved an equally intensive set of methodological and ethical considerations.

## Methods and Ethics

Our unique collaboration between an anthropologist (Susan) and a legal scholar (Tonia) required an equally innovative division of labor for this book, which built on nearly a decade of interdisciplinary feminist work

together.<sup>7</sup> Susan carried out the ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and quantitative research, while Tonia offered sharp feminist legal insights that were instrumental in moving this long-term project forward over the course of six years. We worked hard in designing and carrying out this research to directly combat representations of the women with whom Susan directly worked, particularly by implementing a mixed methods approach that made her accountable to the potential implications of this research. This book is the product of our intellectual synergy and would not have been possible otherwise, but our division of labor presents challenges a bit outside the scope of conventional ethnographic writing. We solve this problem by switching between first person singular (“I,” “me,” and “my”) to refer specifically to Susan’s independent research interactions and first person plural (“we” and “our”) to indicate our jointly defined arguments.

This project employed an iterative methodology, approved by the University of Wyoming’s Institutional Review Board, that began when I received permission to live as an unpaid staff member at a Denver transitional housing facility for women leaving the sex trade. I spent approximately four days and three nights per week over the course of a year engaged in participant observation with the women and staff members; more specifically, this involved my attending house meetings, engaging in addictions and therapeutic groups, waiting at free medical clinics and social services offices, cooking and eating together in our shared kitchen, watching television, and interacting with women’s loved ones and family members. Living together in this way resulted in the formation of close bonds between me and many of the women, with all the accompanying complexities and dysfunction that the term “family” implies.

I used my spare time in the evenings and early mornings at the transitional housing facility to enter data from paper-based client files into an electronic spreadsheet for use by staff members, who fully supported publication of the results. Staff members had assembled these client files from services provision encounters with 131 women who sought to leave the street over the course of a decade.<sup>8</sup> Such files constitute significant knowledge-production instruments because they are physical manifestations of the ways in which alliance professionals create and reinforce the rationale for specific programs and services by empha-

sizing particular aspects of women's lives. These files contain a wealth of information on women's general demographic characteristics (age, race/ethnicity, relationship status, children), experiences with employment and the criminal justice system (previously held legal jobs, arrests, charges, convictions), substance abuse and health (drug of choice, duration of use, mental health issues, family histories), and summaries of formative life events (referral processes, government benefits, reasons for help seeking).

My gradual integration into street prostitution's cultural and spatial world through the intimacies of shared living space allowed me, in the second and third years of this project, to conduct and audio-record one hundred semistructured interviews with women actively working the street or residing in the transitional housing facility. These interviews took place in the midst of my extensive participant observation in the East Colfax Avenue neighborhood where the women engage in transactional sex and where I was initially questioned by police officers and potential clients. While I did not trade sex for money or illicit drugs on the street, the experience of being closely watched by law enforcement officers and men seeking transactional sexual encounters provided me with at least some sense of what women experience working the streets. This participant observation would not have been possible in the same way without Leelee, whom I lived with in the transitional housing facility and who had years of East Colfax Avenue experience. An astute cultural broker who appeared to move effortlessly between street and alliance cultural contexts, Leelee offered insights that were instrumental in shaping the research for this book and the arguments presented here.

I designed the participant observation aspects of the research to resemble women's interactions with the alliance as closely as possible without myself getting arrested, being incarcerated, or engaging in street-based trading and illicit drug use. I regularly traveled, often with other street-involved women but sometimes alone, from motel rooms where women were using various controlled substances after "getting a lick," as they call earning money in a variety of illicit ways, to a police station, correctional facility, or addictions-treatment-oriented transitional housing facility. Moving from site to site conducting participant observation, as well as semistructured interviews when the women's time and

energy allowed, was the closest approximation I could safely and legally take to the pathways street-involved women follow on a daily basis.

Although I regularly smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol with the women, I chose not to participate in street-based sex trading, illicit drug use, or other criminalized activities with the women because I do not believe that my doing so would approximate the experiences of women who engage in these behaviors on a long-term basis. My positionality as a stably housed White woman able to afford an attorney probably would have resulted in my having extremely different encounters with the criminal justice system, which would have rendered such engagement unproductive. Nevertheless, a number of street-involved women cautioned me that this research would always be incomplete without my experiencing the pleasures associated with smoking, injecting, or otherwise ingesting their respective drugs of choice, or the adrenaline rush that accompanies the various hustles they engage in to make a living. A few women also used this argument when they offered to work the street with me, most often through a mutually beneficial arrangement that would involve me sharing a portion of my earnings in exchange for their screening my prospective clients.

Despite my decision not to directly engage in these criminalized activities, I was constantly surrounded by them. I often had to make quick ethical decisions, such as when I opted to openly discuss my research on several occasions with justifiably puzzled neighborhood police patrol officers who questioned me regarding my reasons for being in what criminal justice professionals term a “known prostitution area.” Women regularly used or were under the influence of illicit substances while we spent time together, and they often told me about illegal activities they had witnessed or engaged in themselves. I followed anthropological norms in nonjudgmentally observing these activities within their cultural context and attempted to implement this policy as much as possible with alliance professionals by treating them with the same empathy and suspension of judgment as I did the women. While these experiences and practices created sometimes intractable ethical challenges, they were formative in shaping my understanding of the everyday issues that street-involved women and alliance professionals face.

One of the foremost ethical challenges I struggled with in speaking to individual members of these oppositional groups, a number of whom

knew one another from previous professional encounters, stemmed from my acquisition of specialized in-group knowledge. Particularly in meetings and interviews with criminal justice professionals, I tried to remain cognizant of the potential to unintentionally reveal information about specific individuals or trade-related knowledge that police might use to arrest the women. I likewise had to withhold from the women information about police procedures that officers shared with me in strict confidence as context for their stories. Doing so proved especially difficult when I listened to women share partial or incorrect advice with one another about procedural norms in undercover and other police operations, and yet I could not ethically compromise one group's confidentiality to protect another's.

Criminal justice professionals, especially those with years of experience working vice or patrol, expressed surprise and, less frequently, suspicion regarding the rapport I enjoyed with the women, which meant that I often had to work very hard to demonstrate solidarity and alignment with their alliance perspectives. I generally did this by positioning myself as "one of the family," typically by casually mentioning my father's undercover police work in a New York State narcotics unit. I often used humor to lower male officers' initial resistance to meeting with me by telling those who worked undercover, "My Dad bought a lotta dope in the '80s." Yet this rapport with criminal justice professionals sometimes made me uncomfortable in that I felt these friendly relationships betrayed the women to some extent. I often left interviews with criminal justice professionals, many of whom I genuinely liked, feeling deeply conflicted by what the alliance demands of its workers, particularly as I juxtaposed their perspectives with those of the women. These sentiments were further complicated as I watched officers with years on the force get emotional, or even cry, about the difficulties and risks of their work. Their courage in sharing this vulnerability with me deeply enriched this project by humanizing individuals whom it otherwise might have been easy for me to demonize due to their role as agents in a system that so dehumanizes the women.

An ancillary ethical dilemma that arose with criminal justice professionals involved my initial difficulties in building rapport as a means to elicit something beyond the kind of official occupation-specific rhetoric they might espouse with a journalist. Criminal justice professionals, like

the street-involved women they arrest or supervise, must retain a degree of skeptical cynicism about outsiders' sincerity and motives in order to do their jobs effectively. My long-term involvement with the transitional housing facility played a pivotal role in providing me with entrée into the otherwise relatively closed criminal justice community. I was able to introduce myself as a staff member at a facility that regularly receives referrals from the Federal Bureau of Investigation as well as from Colorado public defenders, detectives, and other criminal justice professionals, which allowed me to make claims to at least some insider status with the alliance.

I consciously bolstered this status by telling criminal justice professionals about male members of my family who, like many of the men I spent time with in the research, worked in law enforcement after serving in the U.S. military. Officers who expressed reticence about doing an interview with me frequently opted to speak very candidly when I added something at the end of an e-mail or phone conversation along the lines of, "I know you're busy, but maybe you could think of this as a favor to a cop's daughter?" Claiming insider, or even quasi-familial status, worked to minimize the concerns raised by some alliance professionals' stereotypes about professors' leftist—and even anti-police—leanings. As my father succinctly put it when I bemoaned my initial failed attempts to build the kind of research relationships I wanted to have with criminal justice professionals, "Suze, they're just afraid you're gonna write a book that goes all liberal on 'em."

Once I succeeded in befriending a few detectives, I began to receive referrals to their younger colleagues, who I sometimes worried might feel coerced into speaking with me since they typically involved e-mails from superiors that read something like, "I sincerely hope you will consider talking to Susan." The few criminal justice professionals who generously allowed me to spend extended periods of time with them did so on strict conditions of confidentiality. As they began to share information more openly with me over time, I understood their initial reticence and the potential for misinterpretation regarding their accounts of encounters that rapidly turned negative during an arrest or of colleagues who had engaged in professional misconduct. Accounts of negative police encounters, which were very much the exception rather than the rule in my conversations with officers, were the subject of extensive

news media coverage throughout the later stages of this project, which further complicated my efforts to build trust.

Even the few officers with whom I enjoyed a strong rapport worried that I might take an anti-police perspective in subsequent publications derived from this research. They would specifically state, particularly when we were engaged in lengthy unrecorded conversations, that I did not have permission to publish particular information they shared with me. There is much ethnographic material that, out of my respect for this boundary, consequently must remain unpublished although it definitely informs arguments presented in this book. So while I was very privileged to receive some insights into criminal justice professionals' relatively closed world, my membership in it was always partial at best, in sharp contrast to the extended periods of time that I was able to spend with the women and social services providers after they had sufficient opportunities to observe me and make assessments about my intentions.

In the fourth year of this research, I received permission to sit in on an otherwise closed Denver-area prostitution diversion courtroom, which I complemented with regular visits to criminal courts that are open to the public. These observations were particularly meaningful since my long-term engagement in this work meant that I knew a number of the street-involved women facing criminal charges or diversion court scrutiny. Sometimes women would sit next to me on a courtroom bench and engage in whispered running commentary regarding court activities; their perspectives dramatically informed my understandings of how women experience the criminal justice system. My presence in prostitution diversion court became such a regular feature in conjunction with my interviews with court staff that, during one particularly memorable instance, the presiding judge began court by smiling and asking, "So, Professor, how's life on the streets these days?" "Can't complain, your honor," I awkwardly responded while sinking lower on the bench as the other women laughed at me.

As a woman in my midthirties, I fit the demographic profile of many Denver street-involved women and consequently received similar treatment by social services providers, criminal justice professionals, and men seeking transactional sexual encounters. These interactions, which always occurred when I was in street-involved women's company, provided me with rich ethnographic insights into the everyday experiences

that inform women's lives and worldviews as they engage with the alliance. One particularly powerful example of the complexities involved in services provision took place as I waited in the lobby of a drop-in center that provides counseling and therapeutic oversight for two Denver-area prostitution diversion courts, both of which offer weekly meetings with a judicial team and mandatory drug testing as an alternative to incarceration.

The drop-in center employs formerly street-involved women at the reception desk, and its case workers, one of whom I was waiting to interview, dress as casually as their clients and strive to create a welcoming atmosphere. Knowing this, I settled into a waiting room chair that morning wearing secondhand jeans, a tank top, and sandals, nondescript attire that did not visually identify me as a public defender, social worker from a state office, or other alliance professional. I had just begun casually conversing with a few women in the waiting room about a mutual acquaintance when one of the receptionists tapped her purple acrylic nails on the counter and exclaimed to her colleague, "What in the actual hell? Some people think they don't got to follow rules around here." She then turned to me. "What is your name?"

"Susan, ma'am," I respectfully replied.

She laughed derisively and affected an artificially sweet tone that a person might use in communicating with someone who lacks maturity or a basic knowledge of etiquette. "Well, Susan, you think you don't have to sign in like everybody else?"

"No, ma'am," I said, and stood up to write my name on the list of women waiting to see counselors, often as a condition of their probation.

Nodding her head toward the reception desk's large fishbowl filled with hundreds of multicolored condoms, she instructed me, "Now take you some condoms while you up here."

"Thank you, ma'am," I said.

I shoved several condoms in my pocket as the case worker entered the waiting room with her characteristic enthusiasm, shouting out her habitual teasing usage of my professional title, "Professor Susan!"

The other women shifted their collective gaze to the receptionist, who looked away as the oldest woman in the waiting room smirked and said, loud enough for everyone to hear, "Well, well, looks like Ms. Snooty High Booty just got *told*." The receptionist abruptly left the room and,

judging by the peals of laughter among the waiting room women, this was a small victory against disrespect meted out by a formerly street-involved woman to those who remain in the life.

This ethnographic vignette demonstrates how the stigma related to street-based sex trading and illicit drug use pervaded all aspects of the research and necessitated the development of specialized research methods that accounted for these ethical complexities. A fundamental ethical challenge apparent in the services provision context emerged from the reality that formerly street-involved women, such as the woman at the drop-in center's reception desk, can appear judgmental due to their desire to distance themselves from stigmatized activities. In the street context, however, women with experience in the life have a powerful set of dual credentials as self-made women who have conquered addiction and use their street experiences to help others. My concerns about these ethical issues inspired a research design in which, in the street context, I cointerviewed with a research partner who had extensive sex trading experience, Leelee, while at the transitional housing facility I interviewed women alone.

Leelee and I cointerviewed women on numerous occasions from a motel room in the East Colfax Avenue neighborhood where she formerly lived and traded sex while struggling with addiction to crack cocaine. I loosely structured these open-ended interviews, the first of which took place in the second year of the research, around the themes of women's everyday activities, needs, and harm-reduction strategies. The findings that emerged in these early interviews resulted in the focus on the criminal justice system and social services that shaped the rest of the research. The majority of the women knew Leelee, and those who did not readily identified her as an expert due to the ease with which she approached women working the street and explained the study to them. Simply put, this aspect of the work would not have been as productive (or perhaps even possible) without her expertise; as one woman told us, first addressing me and then Leelee in the motel room we used for interviews, "You're a very sweet woman, but I would not have come up in here if girlfriend hadn't been out here and done did it herself."

In these interviews, which featured between one and four participants as per the women's preferences, Leelee would frequently interject with points of agreement or disagreement, prompting critical reflection

on the women's perspectives about their lives and income-generation strategies. Women could stay in the motel room with us for as long as they wanted, providing a welcome respite from the often exhausting outdoor search for money and drugs. For this as well as other reasons, a number of women completed their interviews by asking to stay with us in order to help reassure the next interview participant of our good intentions and to add to the interview as they ate snacks we provided and smoked cigarettes with us. Women consistently praised this approach, particularly as Leelee's and my mutual involvement with the transitional housing facility's program, of which Leelee was a graduate, allowed us to provide women with resources and information about our services as well as those of other Denver organizations.

Macey, an African American woman in her fifties with a long history of street involvement, nodded approvingly as she observed us interviewing two women, noting, "Y'all hit it just right, 'cause see, she [Leelee] been out here for a minute [a lengthy period of time], but you [Susan] know how to write it all down in a way folks'll understand. Your program knows what it's doin.'" Using the highest form of praise, another woman, Ellie, captured the sentiment shared by many others with respect to Leelee's wealth of experience when she happily interjected midway through our interview, "Girl, I feel just like I am talking to my *own* sister right now." The atmosphere of camaraderie Leelee and I worked hard to create during these interviews resulted in incredibly rich and nuanced material in which the women displayed their sophisticated knowledge about services providers' income-generation strategies, which included their rather blasé recognition of the competitive business of nonprofit work. For instance, a number of women matter-of-factly expressed some version of "I'll help y'all, I know you got to do stuff like this to keep your grant," following our explanation of the research and our connection to the transitional housing facility.

It was particularly revelatory to listen to the women talk about the harm-reduction strategies they develop in response to what they perceive as their occupational risks. Women consistently spoke about themselves as tough, independent, and ready to inflict harsh treatment on their adversaries, yet they described other women as vulnerable to violence, arrest, and other harms due to their comparatively inferior street knowledge. It became clear, after multiple reviews of our interview tran-

scripts, that many women may have actually been describing their own experiences when recounting details of other women's violent or negative encounters. While interviewees frequently talked about the victimization of women they characterized as friends, relatives, or colleagues, they almost never self-identified as having experienced such events in their own lives. It is of course impossible to know whether this is actually the case, but this consistency suggests that while our free-flowing and inclusive interviewing strategy succeeded in creating a warm and supportive atmosphere, it failed to allow the women to overcome the street prohibition on showing weakness or vulnerability in the presence of others.

Likewise, my efforts to create collaborative and mutually beneficial research relationships through the establishment of close ties with both the transitional housing facility and street-involved women initially presented a set of ethical challenges related to my conflicting loyalties to both the women and the facility. I consequently faced a learning curve during the first of the five years I spent living and working there. During this time I struggled considerably with my desire to support the women in what sometimes appeared to me as a punitive environment that constantly monitored their movements, bodies, and inner states in the name of helping them through the addiction-recovery process. I occupied a liminal position somewhere between a staff member with keys to the building and access to case files, a volunteer without obligations to report minor rule violations to staff, and a resident involved with the women's everyday activities.

As I drove women to and from appointments and became a friend and confidante to many of them, I often found myself in unexpected situations that socialized me into the complexities of women's lives while also making me privy to information that I chose not to share with facility staff when my own ethical compass determined that sharing this information might produce negative consequences. One day Kayla, a new resident, and I had spent several hours waiting for food stamps when she asked me to make an unexpected detour to meet a person she vaguely characterized as "a friend." Recently released from prison, Kayla talked frequently about what kind of crime she might commit in order to return to the facility where the woman she called her prison wife, whose name she had tattooed on her neck, was serving a life sentence.

Other residents told me that when Kayla was in prison, she exchanged sex with a corrections officer, who eventually lost his job, in return for him allowing her time alone with her partner and other special privileges. After we had spent a few minutes outside a large office building talking with an especially friendly security guard who Kayla said owed her money, she smiled at me and asked, “You know who that was, don’t you?” showing me the forty dollars he had given her. We then went to a big box store known for low-cost prescriptions to try to get her prescribed antipsychotic medication, which turned out to be far more expensive than we had hoped. I held her in the parking lot as she cried and said, “I just want to go back to prison so I can get my meds.” Following our return to the transitional housing facility, a staff member casually asked me, “How did it go with Kayla?” and I shrugged and said “okay,” not wanting to reveal the layers of secrets she had shared with me, or my complicity in keeping them.

I struggled throughout the research as I resisted my strong urge to selectively apply my own conceptions of “help” to the women. I often wanted to invite women with whom I had a particularly strong rapport to stay with me in the isolated university town where I lived when I began the research. It was very painful to think about the women hustling outside in the dead of winter, and I struggled ethically and morally with knowing that I could invite at least a few of them to live with me. Yet I also considered the challenging realities of what it would mean to have illicit substances in my home, as the vast majority of the women were disinclined to give up drug use. I likewise struggled with what it would mean to offer a place to stay or other benefits to women for whom I had an affinity, versus those with whom I did not share such a bond.

These ethical challenges did not diminish as the research progressed and my relationships with the women and the transitional housing facility deepened. Instead, they morphed into new and more complex forms predicated on obligations I incurred to those who had been particularly helpful. One especially significant example of this occurred during the fifth year of the project as I continued my work at the transitional housing facility, which over time allowed me to interact with hundreds of people employed in the fields of criminal justice and social services who otherwise might not have spoken with me about their work. I engaged in two dozen semistructured interviews with alliance professionals, many

of whom I knew through my work at the facility and our previous joint efforts to coordinate services for the women, often under extremely constrained circumstances that necessitated the development of trust bonds. These participants included public defenders, public interest lawyers, police patrol officers, vice detectives, diversion court staff, probation officers, and corrections officers, as well as court-mandated addictions- and other therapeutic-treatment program staff. My interviews would not have been nearly as rich or as detailed if I had not shared significant rapport developed through years of work with these participants, yet this was not without ethical ramifications. Years of working together as colleagues, after all, led these participants to believe that I fully supported the alliance and its ethos in ways that may have encouraged them to speak much more candidly than they would have with a researcher they did not know.

I chose to stop collecting data in the form of field notes, interviews, and quantitative case file data when, in the project's sixth year,<sup>9</sup> the transitional housing facility's executive director asked me to take on the unpaid position of admissions coordinator, making me the first point of contact for street-involved women who wished to enter the program. This professional role provided me with a meaningful way to translate research into practice and, by putting me into daily contact with federal, state, county, and city law enforcement officials as well as correctional facility staff and numerous social services professionals, also had the unexpected benefit of helping me to develop, confirm, and substantiate the arguments presented in this book. The many roles I played in this project, including confidante, prostitution suspect, and social worker, allowed for careful consideration of the multiple perspectives that surround this complex issue.

My current work as the transitional housing facility's admissions coordinator provides me with first-hand insights on a daily basis into how, for many street-involved women, the criminal justice–social services alliance comprises a maze that requires specialized personal knowledge or access to an advocate with that knowledge. As an alliance professional, albeit an unpaid one, it is difficult for me to dismiss the existing system as broken and without redeeming potential. It would be irresponsible to do so given the sheer number of alliance professionals I know who genuinely care about the women with whom they work, or the number

of times incarcerated women struggling with addiction have told me some variation of “going to jail saved my life.” The system does in fact have the potential to create what women regard as positive changes in their lives, and my work at the facility allows me to see women realize these possibilities once they have stable housing in a supportive environment, sometimes for the first time in their lives.

Nonetheless, I would be remiss if I failed to note that I have also seen the continuum of coercion alliance professionals tread in their everyday work as they make decisions that can alter women’s lives in profoundly negative ways. I have keenly felt the sinking sense of being part of a failed and intensely bureaucratized system when refused entry to visit a potential client in jail because I did not have a particular signature on a certain form, even though the sergeant on duty previously permitted me entry without it. I know women who will spend many years in prison on charges they could have avoided if they had cooperated with police or followed other rules stipulated by alliance professionals, and I have had friends murdered by men who may have deliberately sought them out because of their social invisibility as criminalized, addicted women. I have likewise listened to women tell me that they preferred jail or prison to residence in the transitional housing facility; as one woman put it with respect to the differences between incarceration and therapeutic treatment, “Susan, I know how to do time. This doin’ me, it’s just too hard.”

Spending so many years of my life deeply embedded in this system makes it very difficult to write a book that does justice, in the true sense of the word, to the sometimes contradictory, and always complex, impacts that the criminal justice–social services alliance has on all that it touches. Irrespective of the political perspectives a person may take on these fraught issues, it is important to acknowledge that all the people whose stories are featured here are gifted cultural brokers who had an investment in helping us, as authors, to create a vivid portrait of how they make a living. We do so while working within limitations imposed with respect to authorship, the ethical need to protect confidentiality, and the hope that this book appropriately acknowledges our participants’ versatile strategies for being human.

## Chapter Overview and Structure of the Book

Chapter 1, “Workin’ It, Advocating, and Getting Things Done,” argues that women’s street involvement comprises a variety of criminalized income-generation and resource-acquisition strategies, including sex trading, that result in part from their cultural and spatial-environmental estrangement from legal work opportunities and social services. Situating the women’s everyday hustles within this gendered and racialized sociolegal and economic context considerably complicates centuries-old debates about prostitution by elucidating how, for most street-involved women, sex trading constitutes the most expedient solution to their needs for money, drugs, and shelter. This chapter details how women differ considerably by age, other sources of income, and life experience in terms of how they approach sex trading, just as alliance professionals engage in their work differently depending on their personal and/or professional subscription to particular ideological frameworks.

Chapter 2, “Occupational Risks,” argues that the criminal justice–social services alliance pathologizes women’s street-based sex trading and illicit drug use as individual responses to traumatic events that result in flawed thought processes that encourage what alliance professionals often characterize as “high-risk behaviors.” The criminal justice system’s ideological and financial predominance within the alliance necessitates a focus on women’s individual decision making as the product of their trauma-related impediments to full social functioning, and actively excludes consideration of the gendered neighborhood socioeconomic relations that inform these decisions. As described in this chapter, the risk discourse that accompanies prevailing alliance understandings of women’s street involvement has serious implications for alliance encounters with the women as well as for alliance professionals’ own work and personal lives.

Chapter 3, “Harm Reduction and Help Seeking,” analyzes discordant parameters of “help” among street-involved women, who face immediate requirements for housing and other basic necessities, and alliance professionals, who aspire to assist women in achieving long-term self-sufficiency. Yet alliance professionals offer few sustainable means to help women find housing and a legal means of self-reliance that would allow them to meet other alliance benchmarks for success. Many alliance pro-

professionals, particularly those who work directly with street-involved women, readily acknowledge the limitations of restrictive services-provision conditions that often include lengthy waiting lists, mandatory self-disclosure, and abstaining from illicit drug use. This chapter describes some of the significant conflicts that emerge as alliance professionals struggle with the systemic constraints that position the women's collective struggles as individual problems.

Chapter 4, "Discretion," engages with the nuanced implementation of both personal judgment and the mandates or norms governing particular ways of earning a living. Discretion comprises a dynamic process that fundamentally emerges in interpersonal encounters rather than being completely defined by law, professional procedures, or workplace norms. Accordingly, prevailing cultural forces at work in both professional and street communities constrain individual discretionary authority in interactions between street-involved women and alliance professionals, many of whom regard the law as a blunt instrument ill equipped to address the myriad factors that surround and inform women's sex trading, addictions, and homelessness. This chapter discusses these interactions by focusing on the everyday contexts in which they take place, including policing, criminal and problem-solving courts, and probation or other forms of court-mandated oversight.

The conclusion questions the utility of a criminal justice–social services alliance dominated by punitive paradigms that focus on changing individual women's decision-making processes while punishing them for choices they make in very restricted circumstances. In practice, the vast majority of women who come under the alliance purview leave it by returning to the same socioeconomic conditions that impelled them to work the street in the first place. Street-based sex trading both originates from and takes place within the context of women's complex lives in neighborhoods struggling with multiple oppressions; any attempts to provide women with real and meaningful assistance measures must confront these realities.